



Meeting Notes

Attendees:

Date/Time: January 16, 2002/12 pm

Project No.: 50885

Place: Concord, NH

Re: Interstate 93 Wetland Mitigation Sites
Presentation at the New Hampshire
Resource Agency Meeting

Notes taken by: Jake Tinus/Bill Barry

Bill Barry presented an overview of the recent field trip attended by several resource agency personnel on January 8, 2002. The purpose of field trip was to view and assess selected wetland mitigation properties for the Interstate 93 widening project. Copies of topographic maps prepared for the field trip were distributed to attendees. Aerial photographs showing the general location of the "Three Corners Area" a.k.a. "Southeast Lands (Windham/Pelham)" and the Ballard Pond Area were also handed out. Questions and input were solicited from the group regarding the field trip and the suitability of the selected properties (from agency viewpoints) for mitigation potential. Discussion and commentary followed.

The following provides a summary of the comments and views expressed by resource agency personnel regarding potential wetland mitigation sites. Requested follow-up actions are also presented below.

Mark Kern (EPA) commented that chosen wetland mitigation sites should maintain 'long term integrity' of an area and should tie in with other undeveloped parcels. These properties would ideally be located outside development areas to avoid creating "green islands" (essentially preservation sites of limited size or providing limited connectivity by natural resources, that are surrounded by highway infrastructure and other development) which are less desirable. EPA is aware of the local trade-offs that are necessary in preparing a mitigation package of this nature, but believes that a balanced approach is required that address the long term (20 to 30 years in the future) environmental needs of the region, and not just the immediate needs of the communities directly impacted by the widening. With that in mind, the Castle Reach site (Windham) and the Syviak site (Derry) are nice sites, but they are adjacent to I-93, surrounded elsewhere by development, and consequently have limited long term value environmentally. The Eismont site (Salem) is a similar type site unless it is purchased in conjunction with other parcels making up the "Southeast Lands" area creating a site of upwards of 1000 acres.

Mark also noted that the Hackett Hill area in Manchester is an important natural resource area (cedar swamps) that should be considered further. It was estimated that 60 to 70 acres of the area is slated for preservation, and the I-93 project could perhaps triple that amount. Relative to the

Filip Farm site in Manchester, Mark felt the size is limited, but the site has some potential as it provides some connectivity along Cohas Brook watershed.

Jeff Brillhart (NHDOT) stated that mitigation must be directed toward the five towns through which I-93 passes. These Towns are directly impacted and for what its worth are subject to secondary impacts as well. The direct impacts appear to involve 60 to 70 acres of wetland impact. In addition, there are direct impacts to floodplains and flood storage areas, which affect Salem's serious flood problem. Much of the mitigation in the Salem area will involve creating flood storage, which will in effect result in creating wetland areas, and thus helping to offset or mitigate the wetland impacts. The Towns along the corridor need mitigation to maintain their quality of life (literally). The Towns will be upset to learn otherwise.

Relative to the Castle Reach site (Windham) Jeff Brillhart explained that the Department has agreed to negotiate the purchase of 400 acres (less 40 acres \pm near Mitchell Pond), but the Department is reluctant to do so without concurrence from the Agencies that the site is worthwhile and full credit will be forthcoming. Given the ongoing residential development, if the purchase of the site is not clearly supported, the site will be developed and thus no longer available for preservation.

Frank Deljuidice (USACOE) felt the USACOE could support a mitigation package consisting of wetland replacement in conjunction with wetland preservation. The USACOE would not require the NHDOT to purchase Castle Reach if the other Agencies were not supportive or prepared to give it full value as a component of the package. If the site does not satisfy EPA's needs then perhaps it should not be purchased.

Mark Kern (EPA) explained that the site is a good site, but in comparison with sites on EPA's "co-concurrence maps", it does not rate that high. Of the top 25 sites on the "co-concurrence map", only about 5 are within the five communities through which I-93 passes, and the Castle Reach site is not one of the 5 sites. Within the five communities, the Castle Reach site is probably in the top 10 sites. The EPA can accept the Castle Reach site as part of the overall mitigation package, but the EPA will not accept the idea that given the expense involved the mitigation package cannot afford the sites favored by EPA that would provide long term environmental benefits for the region.

Bill Neidermyer (USFWS) concurred with EPA's approach and questioned whether the cost of the Castle Reach site exceeded the benefits of preserving the site.

Lori Sommer (NHDES) stated she was not familiar with the site. She recognized the need to work with the communities impacted by I-93, but was sympathetic with EPA's goal to provide mitigation with longer term benefits to the environment. She felt that it was unclear as to whether the wetlands impacted had principal values relative to flooding, and was unsure whether Salem's flooding problems should be a focus for the mitigation required of the I-93 project. Relative to the Castle Reach site, she felt the price of the property might be too expensive given the property's location vis-à-vis the highway and the need for longer term benefits to the environment.

Bill Ingham (NHFGD) explained that he was familiar with the site and would like to see it preserved, but that a site involving Southeast Lands area would, from a wildlife habitat perspective, make more sense.

In summary, consensus was that the Castle Reach site was not of such importance to warrant immediate purchases. Issues relative to what purpose the mitigation package should serve, and what sites or type of mitigation is required remain unresolved, and as such, the purchase of the Castle Reach site at this time would be premature.

Bill Neidermyer (USFWS) questioned how the issues relative to mitigation (purpose and type) would be resolved, and whether there would be a meeting to discuss secondary impacts and the results of the Expert Panel process. Jeff Brillhart (NHDOT) explained that a summary report of the Expert Panel's findings would be distributed to the Agencies shortly. The DEIS chapter addressing the issue is being written. An Environmental Streamlining Meeting is being arranged for the "junior members" of the streamlining process to discuss mitigation, secondary impacts, and related issues. This meeting will be a first step to resolving the issues by at least framing the issues.

ACTION ITEMS:

VHB consultants to visit and assess remaining mitigation properties (Londonderry and Manchester) as brought forward to date by the NHDOT before next inter-agency field meeting. VHB to prepare maps and aerial photographs showing the sites being considered in these towns and update the spreadsheet reflecting the chosen properties.

NEXT FIELD MEETING:

January 28, 2002 at 8:45 am in Londonderry, NH (Poor Boys Restaurant – Auburn Road)

NEXT RESOURCE AGENCY MEETING:

February 20, 2002 at 4 pm in Salem, NH.

If the above notes do not agree with your recollection of the meeting, please advise the NHDOT Bureau of Environment within 10 days of receipt.